

School Facilities Committee Meeting
October 21, 2015
Superintendent's Conference Room

The meeting was called to order at approximately 7:30 AM. In attendance: Chair Matt Kelley, Executive Director Hans Larsen, Superintendent David Lussier, Facilities Maintenance Director Joe McDonough, Jack Morgan of the Board of Selectmen, Sharon Gray of School Committee, community member Tom Goemaat and Planning Board liaison Lara Pfadt.

Citizen Speak

No citizens requested to speak.

Hardy, Hunnewell and Upham (HHU) Project

Mr. Kelley reported that in response to feedback on the SFC's recommendation so far, the School Committee has decided that further community outreach will take the form of a Parent Advisory Committee to School Committee on HHU.

School Committee has planned six meetings between October and January. SC is asking each of the 7 elementary PTOs, plus PAWS, to provide two members of the parent community to study the data and provide a recommendation.

Mr. Morgan noted that the overwhelming number of responses to the SFC's recommendation on HHU have come from the Hardy community. Not only are community members upset about the proposed closure of the school, they are concerned about what will happen to the building, fields and playground. They also are protesting the SFC's process of getting to a recommendation.

Dr. Lussier said the SFC consists of town staff and elected officials whose responsibility was to commission and study data and consider the technical aspects of school facilities projects, in this case HHU. The time for community feedback is now, before the School Committee votes to move the project forward.

Mr. Kelley said the Parent Advisory Committee to SC will use the SFC data as the basis for making its own recommendation. Mr. Larsen said the parent committee will be an excellent way to start getting more information out to the wider Wellesley community. Traditionally with large projects in Wellesley, he said, everyone has an opportunity to have their say and eventually a consensus emerges.

The committee discussed enrollment and capacity. Mr. Morgan said the four schools that currently have an average size of 370 students (Bates, Sprague, Fiske and Schofield) are viewed as neighborhood schools.

He said a larger Hunnewell and Upham would not be much bigger at the time they open, whatever their capacity. Six schools at an average of 370 students each would still be 2,200 students, and the 2013 Cropper report predicts enrollment dipping below 2,000 by 2023-24.

The committee discussed the enrollment implications of the three school option. The October 1, 2015 enrollment report was discussed. Dr. Lussier said the overall numbers appear to be declining faster than the Cropper report predicted.

Ms. Gray noted that 40 percent of the elementary classrooms across all schools are smaller than School Committee guidelines, which speaks to the current and likely future inefficiency of retaining seven schools.

Ms. Pfadt said such details should be shared with the community to promote understanding of the SFC's recommendation.

Mr. Goemaat said in particular, the two-section configuration of Upham is untenable both educationally and economically, and the SFC should never recommend building a new Upham to the current size. He characterized it as a major reason that a three-school option was not an economically responsible recommendation. Building three schools that were big enough to sensibly operate would result in too much capacity.

Mr. Goemaat said part of the responsibility of being a member of the SFC is to be both financially responsible to the needs of the Town, while taking into account the information supplied by school officials on the best way to provide a top-notch education to the students.

Next Steps: Mr. McDonough will continue to work on potential timeline and steps for the formation of a School Building Committee, while School Committee creates and begins to meet with its HHU Parent Advisory Committee. Those meetings are scheduled to begin October 27.

Adjournment

At approximately 8:34 AM, upon a motion made by Mr. Kelley and seconded by Ms. Gray, the committee VOTED to adjourn.